

What is the community challenge?

Blueprint Schools Network (Blueprint) is a Massachusetts-based nonprofit organization that partners with school districts and state departments of education to promote educational equity and improve life outcomes for students in their lowest performing schools.

What is the promising solution?

Boston Public Schools (BPS) and the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education worked with Blueprint on turnaround initiatives for three “chronically underperforming” schools to improve the educational outcomes for students. Blueprint’s approach to improving student achievement at low-performing public schools is to partner with school districts to plan, implement, and monitor its research-based, five-point framework of: (1) Ensuring excellence in school leadership and instructional quality; (2) Increasing instructional time for students through extended school days and years; (3) Developing a culture of high expectations with an explicit focus on college-going culture; (4) Using data and regular formative assessments to track student performance and focus instruction; and (5) Providing small-group tutoring (with Math Fellows) to support students in “critical growth years.”

Program At-a-Glance

CNCS Program: Social Innovation Fund

Intervention: Blueprint School Turnaround Model

Subgrantee: Blueprint Schools Network

Grantee: GreenLight Fund

Focus Area: Youth Development

Focus Populations: Youth in Elementary and High School

Community Served: Boston, MA

What was the purpose of evaluation?

The evaluation of Greenlight Fund’s subgrantee, Blueprint Schools Network, by John Papay and Matthew Kraft began in 2013 and finished reporting in 2017. The overall goal of the evaluation was to assess (1) whether program implementation maintained fidelity with the Blueprint model and (2) the effectiveness of the Blueprint model. The implementation study investigated if the Blueprint dimensions of (1) Excellence in Leadership and Instruction, (2) Increased Instructional Time, (3) Using Data to Improve Instruction and Learning, (4) Culture of High Expectations, and (5) Daily Tutoring in Critical Growth Years were implemented with fidelity. The impact evaluation sought to determine if attending a Blueprint School instead of another Boston Public School improved students’ test scores. The impact evaluation employed several methodologies to determine Blueprint Schools Network’s impact on students’ test scores, including visual analysis, a comparative interrupted time series approach, matching analysis using propensity scores, and covariate controlled OLS value-added analysis.

What did the evaluation find?

As a subgrantee of the Social Innovation Fund, Blueprint Schools Network engaged an independent evaluation team to evaluate the Blueprint Program. The evaluation revealed three central conclusions: (1) The Blueprint model met most of its implementation targets overall, although it had limited success implementing the Math Fellows program at one site; (2) There is some evidence to suggest Blueprint appears to have increased student achievement in these schools. In particular, Blueprint appears to have had striking success in improving student outcomes in years with leadership stability and more complete model implementation; for example, results from the comparative interrupted time series analysis suggested that there were significant

improvements in English Language Arts (ELA) for youth in all Blueprint schools relative to other Level 4 Boston Public Schools (SD=0.19). Additionally, results from the matching analyses suggested that Blueprint’s involvement appears to have increased student achievement by approximately 0.10 standard deviations (SD) per year, on average; and (3) Blueprint’s involvement tentatively appears to have improved achievement trajectories over time. However, impact results did vary depending upon how the model was specified, the year being analyzed, the school, and the outcome and thus should be interpreted with some caution.

Notes on the evaluation

As noted above, results did vary by analysis, so future research is needed to determine the exact impact of participation in Blueprint schools and the conditions under which the model is most likely to be linked to positive impacts. For example, two of the three Blueprint schools (E. Greenwood Leadership Academy and English High School) closed or ended their involvement with Blueprint before the anticipated end of the study period (2016-2017) and this may have impacted the study’s ability to detect program impacts.

How is Blueprint Schools Network using the evaluation findings to improve?

The evaluation identified several key lessons learned. First, frequent turnover among principals at the Dever Elementary School created an unstable setting for implementing and sustaining school reforms. This experience points to the critical role of establishing stable leadership during turnaround efforts. Second, coherence and alignment in strategy between district leaders, school leaders, and turnaround partners is important in implementing the model. Third, the Blueprint model is more effective when it is implemented with fidelity and when school leadership buys in to the Blueprint approach. Fourth, there are important differences between being a turnaround partner and a school operator. As a partner, Blueprint relied on school leaders to adopt and implement the Blueprint model and take Blueprint’s guidance. As an operator, Blueprint did not face this challenge but did need to invest much more heavily in all aspects of school management.

Evaluation At-a-Glance

Evaluation Design(s): CITS, Matching, and Value-Added Analysis

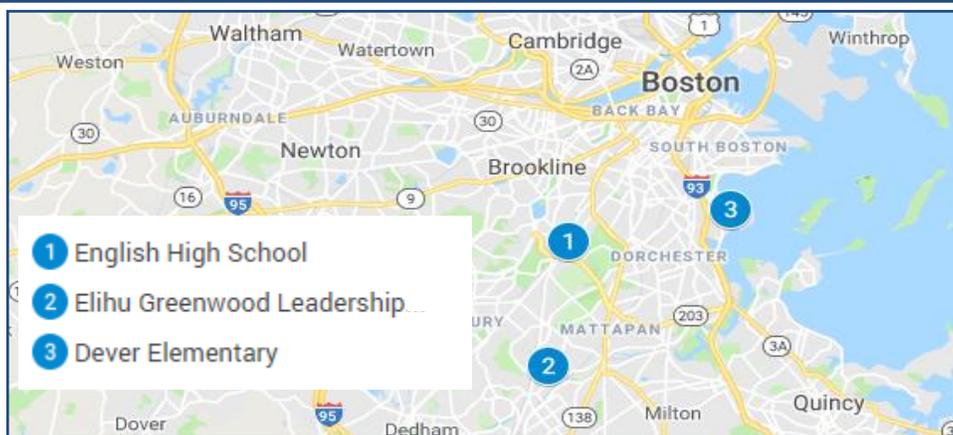
Study Population: Elementary and High School Students

Independent Evaluators: John Papay & Matthew Kraft

This Evaluation’s Level of Evidence*: Moderate

*SIF and AmeriCorps currently use different definitions of levels of evidence.

Study Locations



The content of this brief was drawn from the full evaluation report submitted to CNCS by the grantee/subgrantee. The section of the brief that discusses evaluation use includes contribution of the grantee/subgrantee. All original content from the report is attributable to its authors.

To access the full evaluation report and learn more about CNCS, please visit <http://www.nationalservice.gov/research>.

The Social Innovation Fund (SIF), a program of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), combines public and private resources to grow the impact of innovative, community-based solutions that have compelling evidence of improving the lives of people in low-income communities throughout the U.S. The SIF invests in three priority areas: economic opportunity, healthy futures, and youth development.